

Acton
Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, August 19, 2014, Town Hall, Room 126, 7 P.M.

Attendance

Regular (voting) members present: Bettina Abe, Bob Farra, Bob Guba, Laurie Ullmann, Joe Will (Minutes)

Associate (nonvoting) members present: none

Nonmembers present: Janet Adachi (LSC's Board of Selectmen liaison), John Watlington (Acton resident), Sherman Smith (Acton resident)

Bettina, chairing in Jim Snyder-Grant's absence, called the meeting to order at 7:02 P.M.

Review and approval of July 15 minutes

- One correction: Bob G clarified the device he used to measure the width of the cart path accessing the new bridge site at Robbins Mill. Approval of minutes moved and voted unanimously.

Proposed new steward assignments

- The Board of Selectmen (BOS) has approved John Watlington. John will join the Committee as an Associate. He has not yet been sworn in. John will be Steward of Great Hill and says that there are already people volunteering to help him.
- Sherman Smith will be an Associate member and Steward of Pratt's Brook. He has to get BOS approval yet.

(Note: Jim Snyder-Grant had emailed the LSC that he is in conversation yet with Joe Holmes and has not been able to get in touch with Amanda Stern, both of whom have shown interest in the LSC.)

Brainstorming Great Hill tasks and issues

John had sent out his initial notes on Great Hill and they served as basis for the following discussions:

- Re invasives, Bettina points out that we've just updated the Open Space and Recreation Plan to include additional public education about invasive plants. She intends to make this a winter project. Great Hill is a perfect case in point of what can happen with the invasive, *Euonymus alatus* aka Winged Euonymus or "burning bush." Some feel that we should tag the different invasives growing along the Great Hill soccer field to help educate the public.
- Bob G reviewed the white-blazed informal trail at the summit of the water tower hill. The blazes on Conservation Land go in only 20-30 ft and then stop when the trail hits private land. The trail continues down the hill and widens into peoples' yards. It's essentially a private path. The only Great Hill issue is the blazes. They should be removed.
- On trails over private land:

You enter private land as you go east from the soccer field and over the bridge. That property belonged to Bob Werner. He once posted signs that people were allowed to cross the private land, but someone tore them down. The abutting property is still private. Susie Magoon is the owner. The Open Space Committee has her property on its list, but the list is prioritized.

There is also the trail over Mill Corner private land that goes from the Little Great Hill playing field to the Discovery Museum trail. Bob G: We should get permission from Mill Corner to measure the trail

and put it on a map, and even have it blazed. Bettina: Maybe Jim will take it up with the Mill Corner Condominium Association.

- Another issue is the trail out to 111 with entrance/exit behind the Victor School. Bob G suggests that the least we could do is remove the blazes. It is not known, however, how the Victor School feels about the trail. The School might like it. John: Jim should be in on this discussion as Jim has already investigated this.

If Victor School would like to push the issue, we could do something. There may be something to the south side of the new CVS store being built along 111. We should wait for it to be built to see what happens. A Panera Bread Bakery-Café will be built there too, so people might like access to Great Hill from those sites.

- There is a drainage problem from the Discovery Museums (DM) and, per Bob G, it is serious. The Town should talk with the DM about this. Bob says that we've been aware of it ever since we put that trail there and suggests that now a berm be put there to direct the runoff. John: How would we proceed with this and who would be involved? Bettina: Maybe Jim could run it by Tom Tidman and Tom could put it on the agenda.

- There can be significant water on several of the Great Hill trails. Others agreed and felt that this is usually dealt with by the individual walkers. The yellow trail to the east of Wass Rock is like the yellow trail that heads north on the west side of Nagog Hill. You wear proper footwear, walk to the left or right of the trail, and do some rock hopping.

- On hornet nests, Bettina says that we usually say don't mess with them, but report them and Natural Resources will deal with them. There is a fellow who hangs out around Great Hill and does a lot of good things, and we believe he is the one who eliminated the nest by the boardwalk to Little Great Hill.

- On dumping private yard debris on Great Hill land: There are cuttings from a tree right across from Great Hill on Piper Road. Bob G has signs, "No dumping on Town land" (or something of that sort). Let's post one there. Bob will get a sign to John. Bettina asked Bob to email her a copy of the sign.

- One of the Great Hill "You are here" maps needs redoing. Why do some last and others don't?

Bettina: I don't laminate them that well. But she "has learned and will do better." Bob F: The ones for Robbins Mill lasted really nicely. The ones in the Great Hill kiosks are not that good either. Bettina will make new ones.

- On poop bags signs, Bettina: If you stick signs in front of people, people don't like it. GH is better than the Arboretum. Bob G: Generally humans are lazy.

- On the Great Hill sign at the Kelley road entrance that needs to be re-anchored: Bettina has this on Shawn O'Malley's "To make" list. Shawn makes them in the winter. Bob G: It's the single post sign "Great Hill Conservation Land." Bob has 4 by 4s that we could use to fix the current sign if it is in fairly good shape. It is. Bob can get 6 ft of 4 by 4s. Each should go 2 ft into the ground, leaving 4 ft above ground. John and Bob will work on putting up the sign. Bob will cut two 4 by 4s with angled tops. John has a post-hole digger. The sign should not go too close to the road as it's a dead end and snowplows could knock over the sign.

Bench updates

- Luna's Bench at Pratt's Brook: Bettina has a vendor number for the granite company. She has received some nice donations. Bettina will make out a check to the Town, the BOS accepts it, the Town buys the bench, and Bettina gets a tax deduction. Where does BOS put the money? Into an "Other Supplies" account which is part of the Natural Resources budget overseen by Tom Tidman.
- Sunny's Bench at Great Hill: Bettina has just received a W-9 tax form from *Maine Conversion Products*, the company from whom the bench by the pond will be purchased, so Tom will be able to buy that. Judy Piermarini (the donor) likes the site that we selected, the type of material the bench will

be, and the wording on the memorial plaque.

- Linda McElroy's *Country Casual* teak bench for the Trail Through Time: A purchase order has been created. The bench is back-ordered and delivery is expected in the middle of September. It will go to Shawn, and his Natural Resources crew will install it, as they will the other two benches. For each bench, there is a \$500 installation fee to cover labor and concrete.

Land Use Committee, Town Hall North Wing renovation, temporary move to 33 Nagog Park

See flyers prepared and distributed by Town Hall. For some Town departments, everything is boxed up and it's a bit topsy-turvy. The affected offices are reopening on 9/8 in the Nagog Park facility. While closed during the week, the departments can email if anything urgent comes up. The departments will be at Nagog Park for 6 months to 1 year, except for Recreation, which will stay there indefinitely (which is really convenient to NARA for Recreation).

Bettina described what the remodeled North Wing will look like, housing Building, Health, Planning, Engineering, and Conservation. Meetings on the second floor of Town Hall will not be affected. Negotiations are still going on for the Harris Street building. The outbuildings there might also be usable as a good storage place for LSC tools and equipment.

Water chestnut update

We've had lots of workdays on this. Robbins Mill Pond is getting lots of attention. Bettina and the summer intern Cami Duquet checked Ice House Pond and the water chestnuts are coming back. Vertex Pharmaceuticals has volunteered to remove water chestnuts for their annual community service day on Sept. 11 (2 h at Robbins Mill and 2 h at Ice House Pond).

Is a paddle wheel machine (owned by the National Park Service) useable? Bettina: Associated problems are access to water, water depth, and rocks. In particular, the water is too shallow for a harvester at either pond. If we were to break the harvester, the National Park Service would be upset. Before the National Park Service got money for a second harvester, they voted to not share their machines with the Town of Acton.

Laurie: If the dam at Robbins Mill were to be removed, would that help the water chestnut situation?

Bob G: They won't grow on dry land. Bettina: I think the stream would become too narrow for suitable water chestnut growing conditions. Dams create conditions for the water chestnuts to flourish. They like a slow current.

Discussion ensued on dams (their establishment and their removal) and their effects on flora and fauna. Who's making decisions on the Robbins Mill dam? The Conservation Commission is looking at it and right now it's status quo. There is no momentum to remove it. Janet: Linda McElroy is pushing to have it repaired. Bettina: Right now, I think this is in limbo.

Bob G (to Bettina): You've been doing good work.

Bridges and boardwalks

Bob G: In two days at Robbins Mill we put the bog bridges across the gas pipeline. The Carlisle folks are really happy with this. Now we are working to go into the wet area (to connect Robbins Mill and Spring Hill). We hope to have stringers and sills in place by the end of this week. Bettina will do a \$425 purchase order for supplies. The Town has some pipes that could be used. Bob: Are they the correct size? Bettina will find out. She thinks that Shawn has some left over and the Highway Department has some of all different diameters.

A discussion ensued on pipes and bridges.

Regarding the Robbins Mill-Spring Hill bridge, Bob G said that we hope to get the place leveled, the

sills in place, rebarred into the streambed. Then we don't care if the water comes as we can use waders to put on the stringers. Robbins Mill (via Spring Hill) has to be opened to public pronto, or we'll have to wait another year. Tropical storms are forming and could be heading this way. This project is 50 ft and would be challenging as a Scout project. Was there a Scout assigned to this project?

A discussion ensued on which Scouts are doing what in Robbins Mill (and elsewhere) and the Eagle Scout procedure with the LSC. Bob emphasized that we have to see Scout plans as they can have errors.

Scout and other bridge projects include:

- A bridge by Nick Kim at Camp Acton
- Repairing the red-trail access bridge on Grassy Pond. James Gong is doing this and can access it through the private property of Kathy and Ed Rubin on Willis Holden Drive.
- At Guggins Brook there's a drainage ditch with two planks missing. Also there would be a 25-30 ft boardwalk for an Eagle Scout project. Sid Salunkhe wants to repurpose the old boardwalks. Bob has visited with Sid and they are leaving it up to Jim as to where things go.
- Bob G: Bettina gave me beams to repair a Guggins Brook boardwalk on the access trail from the 111 parking. This repair job is not critical.
- There are a lot of boardwalk projects right now and they are not simple.
- Turnpiking at Nashoba Brook is working. It's downhill from the kiosk that Linda is installing.

At a future meeting, Bettina will update us on the status of all scout projects on conservation lands.

Morrison Farm trails

There exists a Morrison Farm trail map and it's not like our Conservation Land maps.

John: Our maps are all pretty dated, even so on the Website.

Jim's been trying to fix them.

A discussion ensued on some existing map errors.

We need a "new map strategy."

Bob G: It's too difficult to keep the same design. We need a map structure that anyone can go into and edit. In the beginning, Bob gps'd all the trails and the maps should have most of the stone walls on them. We could easily make Google Earth maps. Or we need to identify someone with map-making talent who is willing to volunteer or who we could hire.

Bettina: The Morrison Farm map came from an old Community Preservation Act (CPA) application. In general, the wording on the maps and the maps themselves are being updated. We keep having this conversation and we keep muddling along.

A discussion ensued on making maps.

Bob G likes the type of map that Carlisle and the Sudbury Valley Trustees use. Bettina will find out who does those maps.

LSC/Junior High connection

Joe explained that Allen Warner is retiring as a Grade 8 science teacher at RJ Grey Junior High. In the past, he has organized all aspects of his Gold Team's community service day. To continue this service day, he has to find a teacher to do the in-school organizing and another volunteer to do the coordination with community groups with/for whom the students would be working. His first find at the school has backed out and as of now no one else has stepped forward. Should he find someone to take charge at school, someone (LSC?) would have to do the community coordination. This would have to happen fairly quickly as the service day has been in September in the past.

Bottom line for now: the LSC can't do anything until we know what the Junior High is doing.

Allen also said that he's giving all of his stuff (notably the backpacks used by his students) to the LSC.

Bob G: Where can we store it? In fact, Bob has other stuff that should be stored somewhere. We could give things to Shawn; Natural Resources leases a barn on Harris Street for storage. Before giving things to Shawn, let's ask Stewards if they want any of the stuff.

Brainstorming possible CPA (Community Preservation Act) projects

CPA projects need to be identified in September.

Bettina: One possibility could be the Arboretum fern boardwalk over Mary's Brook.

Bob G: Another project: A long boardwalk across the swamp at the Pacy land, to get from the current trail system to the other side of the wetlands, where an access would be possible from Tuttle Drive. If anyone thinks of any possible CPA projects, let Jim know.

Parcel reports

- Arboretum

Bettina has one quote and needs two more for the Bog Boardwalk.

- Wills Hole/Town Forest

Should there be a map box at Sachem Way? We discussed this before and the general feeling was that there should be map boxes at CL parking lots only. There is no parking for the public at Sachem Way. The Sachem Way development has an office. Let's supply the office with maps and post a sign, "Maps at office." Bettina: This is a good idea to get into the minutes.

- Heath Hen Meadow

Bob G has cleaned out the beaver deceiver pipes. Water is flowing nicely through them (Laurie confirms). However, we need to put a fence around the pipes' inlets. Beavers build up from the bottom of the brook to block the pipes. Beavers will not fool around with outlets. So we need a cage at the inlets. Bob will check with Jim on whether Jim has cage wire left over from the cage made at Guggins Brook. He will let Bettina know if we need to buy anything.

- Pacy

Lees Stuntz of 27 Central Street has a friend working with The American Chestnut Foundation (TACF). There is an opportunity for Lees to get seedlings from TCAF and it would help if the Town could plant chestnuts on CL. They would like to plant three on the Pacy land. Tom Tidman would have to check the spot.

John: There are chestnuts at Great Hill. They grow only so tall, and then they die.

Bob G: How would chestnuts thrive in a pine grove? Tom will have to check this out.

Bettina: It would be on the edge of the pine grove. For the Town to do something like this, it would have to be beneficial and appropriate for the environment. Any tree planting on conservation land requires approval by Tom.

- Canoe Launch

Bettina: I have not been there in a couple weeks.

- Robbins Mill

Trails are in good shape.

- Pratt's Brook

Sherm: Not walked lately. There was to be a walk with Theresa Portante-Lyle and Bob G, but we haven't been able to schedule it yet.

Has trail narrowing held? Don't know. Sherm and Bob blocked trails and tried to conceal them, trying to get people back on marked trails. Sherm will take a hike tomorrow.

- Great Hill

To get from the parking behind the fire station to the CL, one has to cross private land — a strip that belongs to the Firemen's Benevolent Association (FBA). We have two trails across the FBA land.

There is an American elm on this land with other-species saplings in front of it. We should remove the saplings, but we would need permission. We were given a name to contact. John will forward it to Bettina. Bettina will follow up with Jim, Tom Tidman, and/or Dean Charter about this.

Evaluate this meeting

The Acting Chair was excellent, although she didn't write as well on the board as the elected Chair.

The meeting adjourned at 8:34 P.M.

The next meeting will be Tuesday, September 16, at 7 P.M., in Room 126.

These documents that served as background to this meeting were sent by email to the lsc@acton-ma.gov list:

- “LSC July minutes draft” 12-Aug-2014, Joe Will
- “Whole/TF” 11-Aug-2014, Joe Will
- “Guggins report (mostly photos)” 11-Aug-2014, Jim Snyder-Grant
- “State of Great Hill, Aug. 2014” 18-Aug-2014, John Watlington
- “for tonight, re: new steward assignments” 19-Aug-2014, Jim Snyder-Grant
- “Camp Acton Report” 19-Aug-2014, Bruce Rachman
- “Spring Hill Report, with comment about Robbins Mill” 19-Aug-2014, Philip Keyes
- “Nashoba Brook report” 19-Aug-2014, Laurie Ullmann
- “Fw: 8 Gold Community Service Day at RJ Grey” 17-Aug-2014, Allen Warner